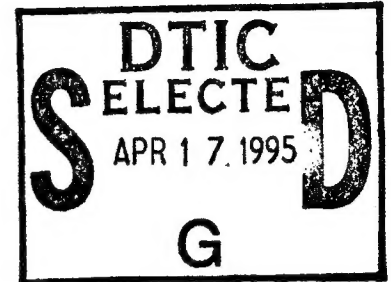


NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.

STRATEGIC AIRLIFT:  
A CASUALTY OF DIVIDED AUTHORITY

by

William G. Dubyak  
LCDR, US Navy



A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

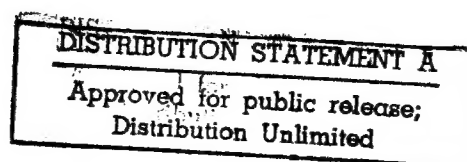
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Signature

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# ABSTRACT

Strategic Airlift is a vital element of our combat readiness in a world where the threat is regional, and where rapid response is critical. Our ability to execute strategic airlift, however, has degraded to a point where Unified CINCs are publicly questioning its ability to support on our warfighting effort.

This paper examines the state of strategic lift, and argues that the cause of the degradation is an inherent weakness in the apportionment of authority between services and CINCs. The central thesis is that TRANSCOM needs programmatic authority to preserve strategic airlift capability. It offers the case of USSOCOM as a model for assignment of authority to improve combat readiness.

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NOTE

This paper contains a reference to remarks made by Gen Downing, Commander, US Special Operations Command, at the Naval War College on 23 JAN 95. In recognition of NWC's non-attribution policy Gen Downing's permission was obtained prior to using his remarks as a reference.

*I think that strategic lift, airlift in this country today is broken, right now. I am not sure that it is workable today for one major regional contingency. I will give you an example. During October when we were reinforcing the forces in Somalia, which amounted to two infantry battalions, some engineer forces, and some support troops, a total of about 3,500, and trying to run one medium size exercise in Egypt, it was all we could do to keep enough airplanes flying to make one moderate reinforcement and one medium size exercise go at the same time."*<sup>1</sup>

General Joseph P. Hoar, USMC,

Strategic airlift, though critical to the US National Security Objective of ability to engage in two simultaneous MRCs, has degenerated to a point where this is far closer to dream than reality. Due to inherent tensions within the system which apportions authority among military commands, inability to maintain our minimum capacity over time has resulted in a degradation of our power projection capability.

Strategic airlift has become a glaring weakness in the continuum of combat skills which will spell the difference between victory and defeat. Although there is wide recognition of this weakness, there has been little interest in assigning to US Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) the authority which will ensure that airlift capabilities are commensurate with our strategy.

This paper will argue that the best possible solution to the strategic airlift dilemma is realignment of authority to give TRANSCOM the ability to direct the procurement which supports its operational responsibilities. It will suggest that combat readiness depends on this realignment, since only the planners at

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<sup>1</sup>General Joseph P. Hoar, USMC, Commander, US Central Command. Testimony, US Congress, Senate Armed Services Committee, 3 MAR 94

TRANSCOM have an appropriate understanding of the airlift requirements of joint operations, especially under crisis action planning. Though this is clearly a move which would blur lines of authority between the CINC and the services, it remains an unavoidable action. By accepting that combat readiness takes precedence over protection of service position and prerogative, we cannot escape the conclusion that in the case of airlift the present system of combatant command by the Unified CINC and programmatic authority vested in a service chief is completely unworkable.

We will begin by examining the planning processes by which Unified CINCs and the services agree on the assets required to support strategic requirements. We will then attempt to determine why the system has failed. Throughout, the emphasis will be on the interaction of the CINCs and the services, in an attempt to explore the adequacy of the current planning system to preserve operational combat readiness. Although the analysis of this paper is arguably applicable to other types of strategic lift, for purposes of brevity I will confine the analysis exclusively to the air component.

#### "THE SYSTEM"

The shortfall in strategic airlift is not a function of neglect. Considerable effort has been expended to establish a system where the operational requirements of the warfighting CINCs are integrated with the long term planning requirements of the services. In effect, a balance has been struck where the

CINCs plan around a promise from the services: "Tell us what you need, and we'll see that you have it." I call this "the System", because it is a much heralded set of procedures designed to guarantee the operational readiness of the military to support national strategic objectives. These institutionalized means are the regulators which align procurement with operational requirements, and in a perfect world they are the guarantors of efficient use of resources to meet long term strategic guidance from the NCA. We'll begin with a brief mention of the two key systems of the Defense Resource Management process.

Defense acquisition is governed by the interaction between programmatic and operational planning systems, the DOD Planning, Programming and Budgeting System (PPBS), and the Joint Strategic Planning System (JSPS). PPBS is designed to produce a plan, program and two year budget with the ultimate objective of providing the combatant commander with the force he needs to complete his mission within fiscal constraints. JSPS is the formal means by which CJCS provides strategic guidance to the military.<sup>2</sup> These systems work in tandem to ensure that there is a strategic basis to procurement of weapons systems.

Programmatic responsibility remains the domain of the services, but Goldwater Nichols institutionalized the involvement of the Joint Staff and Unified CINCs in the process. The legislative history, as well as the final draft both emphatically

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<sup>2</sup>Armed Forces Staff College, The Joint Staff Officer's Guide, (Norfolk, VA:1993). p 5-4, para 502

call for integration of the Unified CINCs into budget decisions made by the services. By law, CJCS has responsibility to

- a. Advise SECDEF on priorities for CINC requirements;
- b. Advise SECDEF on the degree to which service budgets meet the requirements of CINCs in accordance with JSPS;
- c. Submit to SECDEF alternative budgets if necessary to meet strategic guidance.<sup>3</sup>

Once a force structure is in place, resource based operational planning guidance is provided to the CINCs by the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP). Taking into account the forces and capabilities available, JSCP tasks war fighting CINCs to develop contingency plans. It apportions both combat forces and strategic lift to the combatant commanders. JSCP is really the last phase in the budgeting process in that it uses resources provided by PPBS to develop war plans, thus identifying weaknesses and subsequent requirements.<sup>4</sup>

In most cases, this works admirably. In terms of personnel, training, and most weapons programs, the services do an exceptional job of providing what the CINCs require. Unfortunately, in certain areas the deficit between capabilities and requirements is so great that we need to take a second look.

#### USTRANSCOM

Enter USTRANSCOM, established because preservation of

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<sup>3</sup>US Congress, House of Representatives. Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Conference Report 99-824.

<sup>4</sup>Armed Forces Staff College, p 5-4



strategic lift is far too important a capability to be allowed haphazard management. Creation of Unified Combatant Commands is a prerogative of the President under the National Security Act of 1947. By his message to Congress of April 23, 1987, President Reagan executed this responsibility by establishing USTRANSCOM.<sup>5</sup>

Of particular importance in the current strategic environment is air lift, which affords the ability to deploy rapidly world wide. In an environment where the threat is of regional conflicts in widely divergent locations, strategic airlift offers the CINC a number of advantages. First, our force is smaller and increasingly CONUS based, meaning that deployment and sustainment will be from the US, not a forward deployed base.<sup>6</sup> Second, like our personnel, material stockpiles have withdrawn to CONUS. A report by CJCS "concludes the capability to rapidly transport these stocks between theaters and maintain visibility of material while in storage and transit (total asset visibility) is essential to the success of this new logistics doctrine".<sup>7</sup> Finally, by intelligent phasing of material and personnel, the CINC can marry up critical material via airlift with other legs of the strategic lift triad<sup>8</sup>, and control

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<sup>5</sup>US Congress, House of Representatives, Message from the President of the United States, Transmitting Notification of Changes to the Unified and Specified Combatant Structure. House Document 100-69. 1987

<sup>6</sup>Gen Fogelman, USCINCTrans, Testimony, House Armed Services Committee, Readiness Subcommittee, 26 APR 94

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>i.e., Strategic Airlift, Surface lift, and prepositioning.

precisely the force he assembles in a theater.<sup>9</sup>

To accomplish its mission, TRANSCOM is divided into three Transportation Component Commands (TCC), over which it exercises combatant command.<sup>10</sup> Air Mobility Command, a major command of the USAF, is the operating agency for strategic airlift.<sup>11</sup>

The relationship between USTRANSCOM and AMC captures perfectly the rift in responsibilities embodied in formal military planning. As a TCC of USTRANSCOM, under the authority of the Unified CINC, AMC executes airlift and aerial refueling missions, and provides strategic and medical airlift support. As an Air Force major command, under the authority of the Secretary of the Air Force, AMC "organizes, trains, equips, and provides operationally ready common-user airlift forces for unified commands world wide."<sup>12</sup> USCINCTrans is also the AMC commander, but in fulfilling his duties he performs for two different masters.

TRANSCOM's role in planning is executed through the Joint Operation Planning and Execution System (JOPES). JOPES is the vehicle by which USCINCTrans makes inputs to the deliberate planning process, including development, approval and publishing

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<sup>9</sup>Gen. Fogelman, USCINCTrans, Testimony, US Congress, House Armed Services Committee, 17 May 94.

<sup>10</sup>The other two TCC's are Military Sealift Command, and Military Traffic Management Command

<sup>11</sup>Airlift Support to Joint Operations Joint pub 4-01.1. (Final Draft) The Joint Staff, Washington, 15 AUG93 p II-2

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, pp II-3-4

of OPLANS and CONPLANS. It is USCINCTRANS' opportunity to match strategic lift capability to war plans developed by geographic CINCs, and identify shortfalls for NCA review.

#### THE RESULTS

Since there is agreement on the increased importance of strategic airlift, and since there is both philosophical emphasis and detailed means to allow the requirements of the Unified CINCs in the procurement process, it seems safe to assume that strategic airlift should be a robust program with ample capability to meet the needs of the National Security Strategy.

Sadly, this is not the case. Strategic Airlift is in such a state of disarray that there are legitimate questions about our ability to execute even one short-notice contingency of any size, let alone two near-simultaneous MRCs.

There are those who would disagree with the assessment of Gen Hoar, as quoted in the introduction. It can be argued that there is sufficient lift capacity implicit in the entire spectrum of strategic airlift assets, including reserve forces and civilian augmentation, to meet the needs of a two MRC scenario. USTRANSCOM advertises a capability figure of 49 million ton miles per day, which approaches the figure required for a worst case scenario.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, these figures do not bear up to closer scrutiny. The capacity estimate is dramatically increased by the inclusion of non-organic airlift assets. Limiting consideration

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<sup>13</sup>Gen Fogelman, "Testimony" 17 May 1994.

to active duty USAF assets reduces the figure to closer to 15 million ton miles per day.<sup>14</sup> This is a much more meaningful figure, particularly if we consider the fact that a key strength of strategic air lift is to respond quickly in the early days of a crisis, before any significant force augmentation could be accomplished. Even this figure is optimistic in that many forces would be largely unreachable for the first few days as planes and crew are rounded up from flying on routine AMC missions.<sup>15</sup>

An even grimmer picture emerges from consideration of the state of active, organic airlift. The core airlifter in today's fleet is the C-141. Although it has done a remarkable job over the years, the aircraft is now over 28 years old, and rapidly approaching the end of its service life. A program to extend the life of the aircraft is technically possible, but so expensive as to be impractical. As a result, we have seen a steady decline in the availability of the aircraft, so that its daily availability rate was 35% lower in 1993 than in 1992.<sup>16</sup> The C-5, though newer and more reliable than the C-141, is not without its problems. The aircraft is aging, and, due to its age and systems complexity, is considered by General Fogelman as the "most manpower intensive aircraft in the inventory." Its mission capable rate is only approximately 67%, and its 1960 vintage technology is much more expensive to maintain than more modern

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid

<sup>15</sup>Ibid

<sup>16</sup>Gen Fogelman, Testimony, 26 APR 94

aircraft.<sup>17</sup> Even the C-17, widely regarded as a technically superior aircraft, is plagued by contractor problems which may well limit the buy to 40 aircraft as opposed to the 120 originally desired.<sup>18</sup>

Reliance on the participation of Civil airlines in the Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF) program may be misplaced due to the experience of the Gulf War. A combination of reduced incentives to participate in the program, a perception that market share was lost during the Gulf War, and a general tightening of the belt due to conditions of competitiveness in the international business environment all point to an environment where airlines will be reluctant to provide the capacity factored into plans for war time strategic lift.<sup>19</sup>

#### HOW THIS HAS HAPPENED

*If there is one thing we have learned by now, it is that you never give one service total control over something that is of importance to all.* <sup>20</sup>

Lee Hunt, Director Naval Studies Board

Although Mr Hunt was speaking with regard to Space systems, his comments might well have been made in a Congressional Hearing regarding the problems of strategic airlift. These problems are

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<sup>17</sup>Marietta Daily Journal, 7 NOV 94

<sup>18</sup>John D. Morrocco, "US Facing Shortfalls in Two-War Strategy", Aviation Week & Space Technology, May 2, 1994, p 59

<sup>19</sup>Ibid

<sup>20</sup>Steve Weber, "Council Recommends US Navy Retain Space Interest" Defense News, October 17-23, 1994, p 89

not the result of negligence, malfeasance, or incompetence on the part of either TRANSCOM, or AMC. Rather, they are the direct outgrowth of structural problems in the command and control of strategic airlift, and a lack of appropriate level of authority on the part of USCINTRANS.

USTRANSCOM planners face a multitude of problems in matching assets to requirements. Some of these stem from service oriented fragmentation from the days prior to 1987; others stem from weaknesses in the crisis action planning system. During the Gulf War build up, for example, Gen Schwartzkopf made changes which more than doubled the pre-planned airlift requirements to move the 82nd Airborne.<sup>21</sup> The message here is that the celebrated protections of CINCTrans ability to make meaningful inputs to the planning process are not in reality as they were originally envisioned.

Perhaps the most profound problem, however, is in the fact that the USAF, though the agency tasked to procure lift assets for the Unified CINC, is also a service with other concerns.

Given the fact that the Air Force has a number of other programs that are expensive that will be coming on line fairly quickly, the question then becomes how much money gets allocated for airlift; then, based upon that figure, how much airlift do you get for the dollars that realistically you can set aside for that function?<sup>22</sup>

This problem is by no means unique to the Air Force. Col William

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<sup>21</sup>Craft, Douglas W., An Operational Analysis of the Persian Gulf War p.19

<sup>22</sup>Rep Ron Dellums, Remarks, US Congress, House Armed Services Committee, 17 May 94

Boykin, in his article on the establishment of the US Special Operations Command, offers this quote from Principle Deputy Assistant SecDEF for Intl Security Affairs Noel Koch:

If you look at the service programs historically you'll see that they don't change very much or very fast in their emphasis. The traditional 'core' will get funded first and foremost, then the programs that are peripheral to the individual service's core interests, missions, and traditions compete for the resources that are left.<sup>23</sup>

Clearly, procurement of such a critical national asset is too important to expose to the interest based decision making processes of a single service, especially given the joint importance of strategic lift.

There is evidence that the Department of Defense is reaching the same conclusion. During 1994 hearings on the C-17 program, there has been increasing discussion of DOD emphasis, DOD interest, and DOD budgeting.

And it is my view that this year, if there was a requirement for additional resources for the strategic lift, whether it's non-developmental aircraft or C-17, the secretary of defense, the deputy secretary of defense, in managing the department, would put more resources into the strategic airlift line. It is our largest and our most important program.<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, there has been significant reform of the authority of USTRANSCOM to regulate the Defense Transportation System. By his memo of 14 FEB 92, the Secretary of Defense streamlined the lines of authority over all DOD transportation

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<sup>23</sup>"Col William Boykin, The Origins of the United States Special Operations Command, Undated, p7

<sup>24</sup>Deputy Secretary of Defense Deutch, Testimony, US Congress, House Armed Services Committee, 17 MAY 94

assets to assign combatant command to CINCTrans in time of peace and war.<sup>25</sup> General Fogelman has described this move as a proper alignment of authority with responsibility. It does not, however, give adequate control over planning to the CINC tasked with transportation in time of war. And that remains the problem with the system today.

#### A PROVEN SOLUTION

For a model of how adequate control might be reestablished over strategic airlift, I submit that we can look to the legislation which established the US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). Although a complete review of the legislative history behind the formation of a Unified CINC with service-like complete programmatic authority is beyond the scope of this paper, there are telling pieces of information available which are easily comparable to USTRANSCOM.

By its own 1994 posture statement, USSOCOM explains its unique authority as follows:

To assure appropriate priority for resources and equipment development, Congress authorized USSOCOM its own program, budget, and head-of-agency authority for research, development, and acquisition of SOF-unique material and equipment.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Memorandum from the Secretary of Defense . Strengthening Department of Defense Transportation Functions  
14 FEB 92

<sup>26</sup>US Special Operations Command, Posture Statement, MacDill AFB, 1994, appendix B, p B-1



Col Boykin provides additional evidence of Congressional thinking in his paper:

...the DOD has not provided adequate resources or support for special operations forces, particularly in airlift capability. Dan Daniel<sup>27</sup> insisted on a 'CINC with a checkbook' and he got just that with MFP 11. Intent was to see that no more funds were diverted from SOF programs to higher priority requirements by the services. SOF would have what it needed in the future because they would buy it with their own funds, at least in theory.<sup>28</sup>

The bottom line is that Congress felt that the SOF mission was too important to allow the services to divert funds to other areas, so they awarded appropriate authority to the Unified CINC to buy what he needed without having to rely on the largesse of the individual service. The mission was too joint critical to allow individual services to permit its degradation.

It is my contention that this same reasoning can be applied to strategic lift. Though there is a legitimate need for the services to influence the procurement process, and there are compelling reasons to avoid centralization of all military functions with the joint staff, it is also true that the strategic airlift program is entirely too important to be allowed to continue in its present state. Just as USSOCOM was created to protect a critical capability, so must TRANSCOM be enhanced to protect another.

There will be objections to such a plan, mostly from the

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<sup>27</sup>US Representative from VA, now deceased. A leading proponent of SOF reform.

<sup>28</sup>"Col William Boykin, pp 15-16

services who will be giving up authority and control to the CINC. As far back as the original hearings for Goldwater Nichols, there were three main objections to awarding such authority to the CINCs:

1. The CINCs have too narrow a focus to adequately program resources
2. The CINCs are war fighters, and therefore too busy to assume these responsibilities.
3. The CINCs have adequate input to the programs under the status quo.

These arguments have been cloaked in noble expressions of concern:

The commanders of the unified and specified commands are combat commanders who should and must focus on the security of their assigned regions and mission and to the threat to the US interests that they face today.....it would be a tragic mistake to saddle them with the budget processes and burdens that we all go through in the city of Washington (emphasis added).<sup>29</sup>

In response I would offer two arguments. First, Gen Downing, USCINCSOC, has noted that his budgetary authority has made mission accomplishment easier and more efficient. Having the ability to buy what he needs is a help, not a hindrance, and a direct enhancer of readiness.<sup>30</sup> Second, there is no escaping that the present manner of ensuring the adequacy of strategic

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<sup>29</sup>Russell A Rourke, Secretary of the Air Force, Testimony, US Congress, House Armed Services Committee, Investigations Subcommittee, 20 FEB 86.

<sup>30</sup>Gen Downing, in remarks at the Naval War College, 23 JAN 95

lift doesn't work. The USAF, though mission focused, has too many other missions to do this one well. It is time to change.

#### CONCLUSION

There are certainly safeguards built into the organization of the Joint Forces of the US Military to ensure that appropriate lines of authority exist to protect the ability of the Unified CINCs to execute their missions. A more effective and efficient fighting force attuned to unity of effort without service fragmentation was a key aim of the Goldwater-Nichols act, and recent combat effectiveness demonstrates a trend towards more complete integration of the total combat power of the joint forces of the DOD.

There are also safeguards incorporated in the system by which systems are procured and planning accomplished to ensure that the Unified CINCs are given ample opportunity to make their inputs where a decision will affect their ability to execute their warfare responsibilities. With this in mind, many will argue that there is no reason to alter the programmatic authority for strategic air lift, since USCINCTrans has adequate input to the process.

Unfortunately, reality refuses to bear out this line of argument. The fact is that allowing a single service to manage the strategic airlift program for all services has allowed our capability to execute strategic power projection to degrade to a point where we are incapable of executing the basic assumptions of our National Security Strategy. Gen Hoar offered the most

eloquent possible testimony to the inadequacy of the present system.

The simple reality is that at some point we will be forced to make strategic decisions about what takes priority: service autonomy, and a balance between the interests of joint forces and the service staff, or the ability to fight and win in accordance with the guidance from the NCA. The bottom line is that until our strategic lift capability is returned to a relative par with our obligations, we are at risk of a situation where Americans will die because a plane was unavailable to transport someone or something we needed.

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